

# DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

Furrion Aims  
to Reinvent  
Luxury Living

By Crickett Gibbons



An RV with its own helicopter, helipad and hot tub is receiving the latest high-end features and updates less than half a mile from some of the oldest travel trailers and motorhomes in the world.

While the RV/MH Hall of Fame in Elkhart preserves the history of recreational vehicles and manufactured housing, its neighbor, Furrion, is looking to the future of specialty vehicles at its U.S. headquarters.

“Our mission is to make the future perfect – simply put, to reinvent luxury living for a new generation,” explains Furrion CEO and co-founder Aaron Fidler.

The global manufacturer is working toward that lofty goal by combining the latest technology with clean, modern design to produce high-end appliances and luxury items for RVs and other specialty vehicles, yachts, and now homes and businesses. It also has helped design and build an innovative human-piloted machine – the Prosthesis – for a future sport of mech racing.

### Forward thinking

Furrion’s dedication to advancement is clearly visibly at its new Innovation Center and Institute of Technology (ICIT), which opened

in May 2017. Furrion’s presence in Elkhart isn’t new – the company had been there for about five years – but had grown to the point of needing more space.

“The ICIT is our flagship building and Furrion’s headquarters here in the U.S.,” Fidler says. “We spent what felt like forever designing it to ensure it truly showcased what Furrion is about.”

Furrion has focused on improving functionality and design from its beginnings in 2004 with shore power connections, adding LED lighting and ergonomic design that also increased safety, according to Chase Healey, director of sales in the U.S.

The company expanded into modern, high-end kitchen appliances for the RV and boating market and audio-visual components such as TVs, speakers and entertainment systems. Other luxury products include electric fireplaces with smart sensors, cameras and navigation systems, and smart toilets and showers.

Several products are on display in the gleaming, modern U.S. headquarters, which is 100% solar powered, reflecting the company’s commitment to renewable energy.

The building’s massive, airy atrium doubles as a showroom for concept vehicles, which are outfitted with the company’s latest RV appliances and entertainment components.

A ground-floor “country club” area is equipped with a golf simulator, gym, sauna, locker rooms and lounge/kitchen space. Nutrition and leadership coaching is available, along with yoga twice a week and a masseuse twice a month.



The global technology company Furrion opened its new U.S. headquarters, the 35,000-square-foot Innovation Center and Institute of Technology (ICIT), in Elkhart in May 2017.

“The founders are definitely cutting edge and do things a little differently,” offers Matt Petrill, vice president of operations for North America.

In a second showroom, glowing circles light up the knobs on home kitchen ranges. Already selling in Europe, kitchen appliances for the home will launch in the U.S. during the first quarter of 2018, Healey confirms. Separately, four cameras feed one monitor in a new vehicle observation system and the latest Bluetooth speaker lights up and floats.

An open staircase leads to second floor office space for executives, marketing and sales, and customer service, much of it minimally divided by floor-to-ceiling glass walls and doors. Large pop art pieces and seating areas add splashes of color.

A command center at the ICIT connects all parts of the business for live meetings, including the global headquarters in Hong Kong and

the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Elysium is Furrion’s flagship example of what’s possible in luxury RV living. It’s equipped with the company’s high-end appliances and electronics – and the rooftop Robinson R22 helicopter and hot tub.

Petrill describes another concept vehicle, the Limitless, as a “fairly standard fifth wheel that has been ‘Furrion-ized.’” That means a 75-inch HDTV hangs over the large electric fireplace in the living area. The kitchen is equipped with stylish, modern appliances – including a high-end wine fridge. And the bathroom is outfitted with a smart toilet and shower, to name a few Furrion features.

As tempting as these vehicles may be for recreational enthusiasts with money to spend, neither the Limitless nor the Elysium is for sale. Their purpose is “to show off the capabilities, design, functionality and technology” of the company, Healey explains.

Furrion Robotics President and Chief Technology Officer Jonathan Tippett (second from left) and other Prosthesis development team members show off the company’s human-controlled exo-bionic racing machine at the ICIT opening (*Taylor Senne photo*).



offices in China and the United Kingdom, Petrill notes. Nine screens and a wall-sized whiteboard surround the large conference table in one of the few rooms that can be closed off amid all the glass and windows.

“The ICIT unites our designers, creative thinkers and engineers from all over the world and acts as the central hub for innovation,” Fidler comments.

### Luxury options

Products aren’t made locally, but they are tested and designed here. Engineers analyze prototypes that are sent to Elkhart and provide feedback. Petrill adds that Furrion also receives input from companies that use the products and passes it along for improvement.

The 45-foot-long Elysium concept RV, normally parked in the atrium showroom, was in the concept shop during a recent tour. That team needed to update it prior to the January RV show in Florida and

### Building for a future sport

Likely the company’s biggest challenge for seamless communication, precise engineering and technical design sits outside the building: a human-piloted exo-bionic machine – called Prosthesis – built to eventually compete in mech racing.

From a distance, the 14-foot-tall invention looks a bit like an oversized toy model/Transformer robot. But this one really works, controlled by a trained pilot inside. The exo-bionic machine amplifies the pilot’s motions, allowing it to walk, run and jump powered by a battery that can last up to two hours.

“In a world where technology is taking over increasing amounts of our lives, Prosthesis celebrates the age-old pursuit of physical mastery and human skill,” shares Jonathan Tippett, president and chief technology officer for Furrion Robotics. He created Prosthesis and is its main test pilot. “It was inspired by the same impulse to push the boundaries of athletic

performance that drives any sport, but uses cutting-edge technology to take that to a new level.”

Tippett and his team are working to refine the mech, running it through its paces at ICIT before building a second one.

“After 12 years of R&D, we are now well into our pilot training program, but nothing like this has ever been attempted before, and we are pushing the boundaries of technology and human skill simultaneously,” he reveals. “With safety being paramount, we are proceeding with baby steps towards a race-ready machine.”

The project is backed by a Vancouver-based educational charity, the University of British Columbia, corporate sponsors and volunteers. Furrion provided funding to build the Prosthesis.

Finding a way to pick up and transport the whopping 8,000-pound mech has been the biggest challenge to date for the Furrion concept shop team.

Brendon Jhala, the lead concept shop technician, says, “We sat down as a team and thought about it. At first it seemed impossible, but we got together and made it happen. We were excited it worked.”



Furrion’s highest-end gadgets and luxury products are displayed inside the Elysium, a 45-foot concept motorhome said to be worth \$2.5 million. It is featured at various shows and events.

That attitude is what Furrion is all about. “We look for innovative people. People who are creative with a positive attitude,” Petrill discloses, adding, “We try to have some fun while we do the work too.”

So what’s next – other than refining the mech racing machine?

“We have a long list of exciting new product developments in the pipeline,” Fidler replies. “We are working aggressively to expand into new countries and grow our global infrastructure to support new product categories.”

**RESOURCE:** Furrion at [www.furrion.com](http://www.furrion.com)